

The Only Way

A Fascinating Romance
by Alan Adair...

CHAPTER VIII.—(Continued.)

Not the strictest purist on the earth could cavil at his writing to her. As he felt—that is, from his heart—so he wrote to her:

My Own Joyce: I am breaking my self-imposed resolution to tell you that I am leaving England for Australia on the Condor, which sails next week. I cannot live this life any longer. Do you know I come out at night just to look at the house that contains you? There is no joy for anything, and I am afraid of breaking down under the strain. I must work, sweetheart; I must do something. Life is too hard. Joyce, I do not wish to see you again. If I saw you again I should never leave you; but I must hear from you to know if you are well, dearest. I ought to say to you that you should try and forget me, and be happy with some other man, but I cannot. It is tremendous selfishness on my part; but it would kill me if you were to look at another man. But it is not for that I am writing, but to tell you I am leaving. Your own ALAN.

When Joyce received this letter she sat quite still for a little time. She felt as if her heart must break when she thought of Alan. She knew what his unrest meant; she knew that if it were possible that he could lay his head against her shoulder, and feel her hand upon his brow, all his troubles would vanish. But this might not be. Never again could they go through the agony of another parting, never again would they look into each other's eyes and see what it was costing them to walk the path of duty—the only way for them. But she must look upon his face again. She would go down to Southampton, and then she would try and get a glimpse of his dear face, so that she could see for herself how he looked.

She told no one of her project. It was not a wise thing to do, but it was a thing she must do.

Veronica was resting in her room; the boy was with her. Now she had a nurse for him, and she had a pretty house and all comforts; but she looked more haggard than in the old days, when she eked out a miserable existence by teaching. Then there was something to live for, now she had nothing.

She heard a tap at the door that made her tremble. Hutchinson had been a frequent visitor lately—since she had been prosperous. His visits always left her poorer and sadder. She did not mind the money, having a childish ignorance on the subject; but she did mind the way he spoke of Alan. She prepared herself for battle when she heard his knock. He came in, looking more bloated and excited than ever. Lately he had drunk very heavily. Today he was sober enough but he looked more angry than he had done of late.

"So that fellow thinks he is going to elude me!" he said, as he came into the room; "but he makes a mistake!"

Veronica turned pale. She knew he was speaking of Alan, and that he was threatening him.

"What do you mean?" she asked boldly.

"Do you mean to say that you don't know that that precious husband of yours means to sail in the Condor on Friday? I dare say he wants to desert you, and to go off with that other woman!"

"Alan would not do that," said Veronica, quickly. "However much he and she suffer, they will do nothing wrong."

"I dare say he is a saint!" sneered Hutchinson. "Well, he will have a chance of going to heaven quickly, for I've sworn to do for him, and this is my last chance!"

Veronica listened. Hutchinson had spoken like this before, and it had come to nothing; still, it was possible that he might be desperate now. He looked it, and if he meant mischief to Alan she must warn him. Not a hair of Alan's dear head should fall by this man's hand. Still, she knew that she must not let Hutchinson suspect that she was on the alert.

"So he sails on Friday?" she said quietly. "From Southampton, is it not? He wrote to wish me good-by."

"It will be a longer good-by than he knows of," said the man. "Let me two pounds, Veronica."

Veronica hesitated. He might be asking for money in order to kill her husband; but she had often lent him money before, so she rose slowly and went to the writing table and took it out.

"I suppose he has made a settlement upon you?" he asked, with cunning leer. And poor Veronica, falling into the trap, answered:

"Yes."

"Then it's all right," he said, and went out.

Veronica sprang up from her chair the instant the hall door clanged after him. She knew he meant mischief to Alan. She kissed her boy many, many times before giving him in charge of his nurse. She was always loth to let him out of her sight; but today she almost felt as if she would never look upon him again. At the same time she felt strangely happy, for it seemed as if at last she were able to do something for Alan.

Alan had taken his seat in the train without thinking much of leaving England. It had ceased to be home to him; he thought he might be happier when he was removed from the temptation of seeing Joyce, and when he might now and again hear from her. And as he sat in the corner of his carriage he thought he saw a familiar figure pass. It was Hutchinson's clench, but he did not think much about it. He pulled his cap over his eyes, and pretended to go to sleep; but although he kept his eyes shut no sleep came to him. Southampton, it seemed to him, was soon reached. He got out of the train and began collecting his belongings. He was turning to go when suddenly he heard the sound of a report and then a woman's cry. In an instant all was commotion. A woman had fallen close beside him—a dark-haired, slight woman. He rushed forward to help her up, quite unconscious then that the shot that had been fired was meant for him, and that the woman had intercepted it. He had a dim idea, too, that he saw Hutchinson slipping away somewhere; but he, as well as every one else, was occupied by the fallen woman.

His were the arms that helped her up, and his were the eyes that recognized Veronica. "My God!" he cried. And when they said "Do you know her?" he answered "Yes, and the shot has killed her was meant for me!"

He carried her to a room near, and when he laid her down she opened her eyes and smiled. "I am so happy," she said, softly. "Alan, I never thought to feel your arms round me again."

"Veronica," he said, remorsefully. "I would gladly have given my life if this had not happened!"

"I know it," she said, "but think of me for one instant, Alan. You see, I love you, darling. I am dying, so that it does not matter, and my life made you unhappy. By dying for you I make you and her happy. It is the only way, Alan—the only way."

"But, Veronica—" he urged. But she would not let him speak.

"I don't think I have long, dear. Let me die like this in your arms, my head upon your shoulder—so. You think I'm pretty still, don't you? What was I saying? Oh, that it will not matter, except for the boy. But I know you and she will be good to him. I should have liked to have seen him just once again. You know Hutchinson swore he would be revenged on you, and so I followed him; and when he fired at you I threw myself between. I was so happy, Alan, dear. The happiest moment of my life was when I felt that I might die for you."

"Veronica," he said, touched to the heart, "I don't deserve it—indeed I don't!"

"You see," she went on, "I made you so unhappy by living—it is the only way."

And when the doctor came a few moments after Alan could see there was no hope. The bullet had pierced her side, and she was bleeding internally. She fell into a state of semi-consciousness; but towards midnight she opened her eyes suddenly.

"Kiss me, Alan," she said, "and love my boy."

And whilst his lips touched hers her spirit passed away.

Joyce, waiting at the docks for a glimpse of the man she loved, saw the great vessel glide out to sea without him. Something must have happened to delay him, she thought! Full of fear and anxiety, she returned home, wondering what had detained him; but the next day she had a telegram with these words: "Veronica died last night. I am coming at once." And then she knew that something serious had occurred.

Alan came to her, chastened, grey-haired; but still Alan. And when he told her the simple, touching story of poor Veronica's self-sacrifice and death they wept together. And Joyce resolved then and there to be a good and loving mother to Alan and Veronica's boy, which vow she nobly kept. Indeed, there was nothing stepmotherly about Joyce, and she could say truly that she had had nothing but pity for poor Veronica, even whilst she was keeping Alan and herself apart.

Alan lost no time in marrying Joyce again. "They had suffered so much," he said, "there was no need to prolong their suffering." Now, indeed,

their life is the ideal life of married people, whose strong love for each other is not stronger than their love of duty, and who did not scruple to sacrifice everything they loved best for what they knew to be right.

And as for Veronica's boy, he is Mike Joyce's own. Indeed, if anything, she spoils him more than her own children.

"His mother saved your life, dear," she said once, in after days, when Alan expostulated with her, "and he is a dear boy, and he is yours, so you see I have three of the most excellent reasons for spoiling him."

Hutchinson was never seen again. There was a hue-and-cry after him, but he was never found. Whether he knew that the shot meant for Alan had been received by Veronica no one could tell. He disappeared, and Joyce and Alan were glad that it should be so. They had suffered so much that they wanted a little peace. Most of all, they did not want revenge. It was poor Veronica who had paid the debt, and she had done it gladly, saying that it was "The Only Way."

(The End.)

WINTER AMONG ICEBERGS.

An Oregonian Says That the Experiences Are Not Unpleasant.

James Poole, formerly a Portland real estate man, has returned from the North, after two years' absence, a portion of which time he was locked in the ice on the shores of Kotzebue sound. He left here in June, 1903, on board the schooner General McPherson. Mr. Poole's venture in the north has not proved a profitable one, as he left Nome ten days before the gold-beach excitement broke out, and has not found it convenient to return to that point, while Kotzebue, he says, has proved a delusion and a snare. About \$600 adventures were wintered at Kotzebue after the rush thither, but the place is now deserted, except by a few hundred Eskimos, whose regular winter quarters are in the sheltered nooks near by. He says the report of Kotzebue's rich diggings arose from the fact that the aborigines had bartered nuggets for food and clothing with the captains of whaling vessels visiting that region, but the gold evidently had been picked up on the shores of Nome, to the southward some 500 miles. He said the sensation of being inclosed by icebergs during a long arctic winter was not so unpleasant as one might imagine, as the days are seldom less than six hours long, and access to the shore is usually easy. The General McPherson's decks were crowded with men, and this gave her the appearance of a house surrounded by stationary icebergs. Further out toward the Arctic ocean the great walls of ice took the appearance of windrows, as the motion of the waves piled them up in parallel lines. When the break up comes in the spring the real danger to shipping is being carried out by the floating islands of ice, to be crushed perhaps between great masses in motion. From his acquaintance with the Eskimos of that region, Mr. Poole judges them to be of Chinese or Japanese origin, there being a strong resemblance in appearance, build, and language. They are peaceable and honest, and quite willing to act as guides for the whites, who employed them to a considerable extent while prospecting along the banks of the streams emptying into the sound. They live by fishing in the summer season, putting up large quantities of the salmon, which abound in great numbers in the streams. This dried salmon and what grouse they manage to snare in winter form the bulk of their food. They heartily relish the white man's flour, however, and are willing to part with their own product at a sacrifice in order to obtain it. In speaking of the adventures attracted to the far north by the reports of rich gold mines, Mr. Poole said the proportion of those who lost their lives by shipwreck, hardship and scurvy would be appalling if the figures could ever be known.—Portland Oregonian.

Robert or George?

The legitimist Jacobite league of Great Britain and Ireland, through Registrar Rodway of the North American Cycle of the Order of the White Rose, Roxbury, Mass., has issued a circular to the faithful, asking, "Who has the best right" (as heir to the British throne), "Robert or George?" "Robert" is the son of Princess Mary Theresa of Modena, now the Princess Louise of Bavaria, who is styled by the legitimists Mary IV. (of Scotland) and III. (of England), whose descent from the male line of the Stuarts is undeniable, but whose ancestral claims to the throne were set aside by the act of succession that excluded Catholics from the crown. "George" is the Duke of York, so that it is evident that "the legitimist Jacobite league" admits Queen Victoria and the prince of Wales.

The average man imagines that if all the fools were dead his opinions would soon become universal.



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